



[Letter to the 'Stornoway Gazette' about the History of Harris Tweed]

Sir, The recent four articles by Frank Thompson on 'Clo-Mor' that appeared in recent issues of the Stornoway Gazette were interesting. It is a great pity however, that Mr Thompson did not attempt to give an objective account of the recent history of Harris Tweed instead of appearing to blame the small producers for the troubles that befell the industry in the late sixties and early seventies.

Harris Tweed, he says, 'was in a vulnerable position, first it was single-width and secondly, many relatively small firms ... cut prices and competed among themselves for the cheaper end of a diminishing market'. These two factors were fortunately seen in their economic perspective and a strategy was planned. With some assistance from the H.I.D.B. the number of spinning firms in Lewis was reduced, etc. This is a subject which a great many people in Lewis and Harris are deeply interested in and we would expect a writer of the calibre of Frank Thompson to do better than that, if he is to pronounce on this issue at all. The small producers were no paragons of virtue but their sins against the Harris Tweed industry pale into insignificance in comparison to the mad recklessness of the spinners who over a long period of years cut prices and competed against each other until they were ALL on their knees. Then elements among them introduced imitation double-width and the weakly H.T.A. then, as usual, backed them

Then the H.T.A., the H.I.D.B. and the spinners engaged in a two-year propaganda exercise to soften up the weaver and public opinion in anticipation of an application to amend the 'Orb' definition and convert the industry to power-weaving by mill employees in three units (one per mill). In that way throwing over 500 of the 550 self-employed weavers out of work.

Referring to the recession of the early 1970s, it is a pity that he did not devote more space to the 1970s controversy and it is also a pity that he gives the impression that it was many of the relatively small firms in the industry that caused much of the trouble the industry found itself in at that time when he makes the erroneous statement that 'many relatively small firms ... cut prices and competed among themselves for the cheaper end of a diminishing market'. By implication, the reader's attention is thus directed to the small producers while the spinner/manufacturers are exonerated.

However, Mr Thompson's treatment of the 1970s recession and the events of the period was brief and not a very accurate account of the facts of the situation. He says 'many relatively small firms ... cut prices and competed among themselves for the cheaper end of a diminishing market'. By implication he gives the reader the impression that much of the trouble of the period stemmed from the activities of the small producers.

[ends]

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